

GOLD MINES BURIED IN GOLF COURSES

The Lavish Sums Spent by Enthusiasts in Altering the Very Landscape to Bring More Science Into the Game

By A. LINDE FOWLER



DRIVING eighteen stakes into the ground to indicate the spots for as many teeing grounds, and eighteen more stakes to denote where putting greens shall be developed, no longer suffices in golf links architecture, on the word of Donald J. Ross, who is looked upon generally as the greatest expert in the country today on the layout and development of courses. Golf course construction is now a science, according to Mr. Ross. The days of haphazard construction are nearly done, because the clubs are spending large sums of money on their links and they have learned from experience that not to do the thing correctly in the first place means the expenditure of further large sums to undo what has been done and start afresh.

Moreover, says Mr. Ross, the young man of today who is looking for a vocation will do well to consider golf from the scientific angle appertaining to golf course construction or from the angle of a man who can combine the knowledge of greenkeeping with that of clerical duties, so that he can take on the secretaryship of a club and apply himself both to directing his forces on the links and those in the running of the club house.

It is not often that Donald Ross finds time to philosophize on golf or any other topic. There is such a demand upon his services for laying out golf courses all over the country that most of his talking is done before a board of directors and other officials of various clubs, or else in leaving directions for the men who carry out his plans for a course while he is off to some other point. It was only a few years ago that he resigned as professional of the Oakley Country Club, after a long tenure, to go to the Essex Country Club at Manchester, ostensibly as professional, practically to re-design that course and bring about the many and striking alterations which have developed the Essex course from a second-rate test to one of championship quality.

In the course of his work at Essex, and as a result of being sought in an advisory capacity by officials of other clubs, Mr. Ross realized that golf course construction is an applied science. He soon found that it was necessary for him to be able to master engineering problems; to be able to show on paper what could be done for golf on a piece of rough property; how money could be saved by utilizing for one spot the waste material from another and how it also was necessary to study landscape architecture, in order to have his greens, bunkers and other features conform to the natural contour of the land. Realizing all these things, he studied hard and, as golfers know, with great success. Hence he advises any who hope for suc-

cess in the line of golf course construction not to enter upon the work unless prepared to apply themselves tirelessly to the task in hand.

THE ARCHITECT AND THE CLUB

There never was a time when golf and country clubs were more ready to go deep into the exchequer to provide a first-class golf course than is the case today. There never was a time, on the other hand, when the club officials and influential members were less inclined to make heavy expenditures blindly and find themselves, eventually, with a fortune of outlay and a second or third-rate course. They are willing to grant the expert's superior knowledge of what should be done, where hazards should be placed, where trees should be cut down, where rocks should be blasted—but they want to know the whys and wherefores.

That is where the blueprint figures. The expert links architect, like Mr. Ross, visits the property on which a golf course is to be laid out, or where there is one needing alterations. He goes over the property and makes a minute study of its configuration, from a golfing standpoint. He may spend one day tramping over a piece of property, or he may spend several days. To illustrate with a local instance: Mr. Ross was asked to lay out the present nine-hole course of the Kernwood Country Club at Salem. He spent three days there doing little else than studying and then restudying the property. He went into a clump of trees, sat down on a rock there and finally concluded that there was an ideal spot for one of the putting greens.

There were holes which he saw would have to be drained; points on the course where hundreds of loads of dirt would be needed and other points where this dirt might be hauled from. When he finally presented a draft of his ideas for the officials to look over—well, one of them told the writer he thought at first Mr. Ross was crazy. When the development was worked out along the lines proposed, it was not Mr. Ross who was crazy, but this member was "crazy" about the layout.

Going from a club committee with his blueprints, with all the details and specifications jotted down, Mr. Ross finds a satisfactory start for his work. The committee can study the plans, see what it likes and does not like; ask the architect why he favors this or that and specify wherein they may disagree with him. They can post the plans for the study of all the members and get a majority opinion on the desirability of the layout as given. Therein is protection for all hands. If the majority of a club's members are satisfied with the layout as it appears on the plans, and have some idea of the amount of money to be expended, the committee which has to do more

directly with the final steps is relieved of the responsibility. The architect, knowing that he is undertaking something which involves a large expenditure, feels much more comfortable if he has given the club a fairly definite idea of how the course will shape up in its finished state and has his ideas approved.

COURSES ALREADY SPOILED

The haphazard laying out of courses in years gone by has been exceedingly costly to many a golf and country club in this country. Some of them have the membership and the wealth to undo the damage, but there are others which are obliged to stick by an unsatisfactory layout for lack of funds. There was one such which Mr. Ross visited this Summer and characterized as "hopeless." It was laid out badly at the start and subsequent changes made the situation worse rather than better. To make this course over into what Donald Ross would consider worthy the expert's skill would require double what already has been spent. Possibly it could be done in the manner Alec Campbell once suggested as the only way of improving a certain course, viz., have an earthquake to change the configuration of the land and then use plenty of soil dressing.

There is a course down in Connecticut where thousands of dollars have been wasted because someone in ignorance of what a good golf hole embodies put through several fanciful ideas, one of which involved the expenditure of \$12,000 for just one hole, which was played a few weeks and then abandoned. A large slice of the \$12,000 was spent in the construction of a teeing ground, which now serves as a constant reminder to the club's green committee of how easy it is to throw away money on a golf course.

The Country Club of Detroit, where this year's National amateur championship was played, was pronounced by Harry Vardon and Edward Hay (according to reports) as the best course in America. When the majority of the country's leading amateurs went there for the championship they in great numbers agreed that while the course has wonderful turf, its fair greens are far too wide and its artificial bunkers too far away from points they are supposed to guard. If the club's committee in charge acts upon these criticisms, it will cost considerable money, both for the services of an expert to supervise the changes and for the cost of labor and materials. On the other hand, the club probably realizes now that in having such wide fairways it not only provides too much freedom for the golfer in his long game—encouraging long hitting as against long hitting plus accuracy—but that such wide fair greens cost a large sum of money to develop and then more disproportionate sums to maintain. The wider the fairgreen, the more time it takes to keep the grass down to required length, and time is money on golf course upkeep, as in other lines.

Although the question was not put to Mr. Ross, the probabilities are that at least fifty per cent of the demands upon his services as an expert come from clubs which desire to have their courses remodelled. Golf is a game in which there is more chance for favorable or unfavorable comparisons of playing conditions than in almost any other sport which can be mentioned. The golfers, especially those who

attain sufficient proficiency to make open tournaments an attraction, visit many courses. They soon recognize if their own is inferior to the average and then begin to criticize, or else use their influence to bring about a change.

With many a club, money is no object, so long as there is a satisfactory return upon the investment, the "return," in this connection, meaning a first-class layout. Anywhere from \$50,000 to \$300,000 or even more is spent on acquiring property, developing a course and erecting a clubhouse. The money invested in golf and country clubs in the United States runs high in the millions, how high would be simply a guess.

But the attitude of some men, or clubs, is reflected in some of the experiences of Mr. Ross. He was sought out on one occasion by a man of wealth who had made up his mind that he would have a golf course on a large tract of summer-resort property which he owned. Mr. Ross did not feel like accepting the task, for the reason that he concluded it was more a passing fancy than a real purpose, and that the course would be of an inferior nature, hence reflect little credit upon the architect, if not an actual discredit to his ability. His plan to rid himself of the commission and at the same time to create no hard feelings, was to set what he thought was a prohibitive figure for his services. He named the figure and was taken aback when the response was:

"Oh, that's all right, perfectly satisfactory. When can you begin work?"

Subsequently Mr. Ross found that it was not an inferior summer course he was to build, but one of thorough up-to-date-ness and about as interesting an engineering and aesthetic problem as he ever tackled. The sum of \$100,000, in round figures, has been spent on that links up to the present, with most pleasing results.

A group of wealthy men in Connecticut have empowered Mr. Ross to start in on a course which they aim to have second to none in point of scientific layout, regardless of expense. A new course is being laid out by him at Nantucket, where conditions will be similar to the British seaside courses; i. e., with the ocean close at hand; natural valleys and undulations, sand dunes, and other seaside features.

Mr. Ross is at work on remodelling the Portland Country Club links; he has remodelled the Exmoor Country Club course in the Chicago district; has laid out new courses at Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Dayton, St. Augustine, Memphis, Topeka, Warren, (Pa.), Grand Rapids, (Mich.), and Detroit. He has remodelled the Oakwood Country Club of Cleveland, besides advising on changes or laying out other courses which he could not remember offhand.

These courses mentioned have been all under the architectural supervision of one man, taking no cognizance of the work being accomplished by others. Arthur G. Lockwood is laying out two or more eighteen hole courses at present, and A. W. Tillinghast is busy along the same lines in the South. Charles B. Macdonald was the architect of the National links, on which approximately quarter of a million (more rather than less) has been spent to have a course with holes copying the best features of the recognized great holes of best courses in the world.